

Contributions from the Red de Semillas “Resembrando e Intercambiando” to the “Global Report on the Seed Emergency” inserted into the global campaign: “Seed Freedom” led by Vandana Shiva

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Red de Semillas “Resembrando e Intercambiando”



Red de Semillas “Resembrando e Intercambiando”, (The Seed Network “Resowing and Exchanging”), is a decentralized organization that is technical, social and political in nature and which has worked for over ten years to unite efforts around the use and conservation of agricultural biodiversity in a local, state and international context. Its primary objective is to facilitate and promote the use, production, maintenance and preservation of agricultural biodiversity on farmers’ lands and on consumer’s plates, given the serious loss of genetic resources which is deeply impacting agriculture and livestock rearing and which according to FAO statistics amounts to more than 75% loss in the last century.

The real wealth of the Red de Semillas lies in the diversity of people and groups who form the network. Farmers, technicians, consumers, rural catalyzers and facilitators and people affiliated to universities and research etc. all participate in the network. However, the real sustenance and strength of the Red de Semillas is found in the local seed networks scattered throughout the whole country which manage the use and conservation of agricultural biodiversity at a local level, thereby favoring the work of recovering, conserving, improving and using traditional varieties.

The national Red de Semillas “Resembrando e Intercambiando” is a country-wide coordinating organisation which brings together the following bodies: Centro Zahoz (together with its entities the Red de Guardianes de Semillas y la Asociación para el Desarrollo y Estudio de a Agroecología) (Castilla León), CIFAES-Universidad Paulo Freire Tierra de Campos (Castilla León), Red Canaria de Semillas y Red de Semillas de Gran Canaria (Canarias), Xarxa Catalana de Graners (Catalunya), Gaiadea - Les Refardes (Catalunya), Esporus – L’Era (Catalunya), Ecollavors (Catalunya), Triticatum (Catalunya), Llavors d’Ací (Pais Valencià), Asociación Albar (Pais Valencià), Associació de Varietats Locals de les Illes Balears (Illes Balears), Asociación APAEM – Banc de Llavors de Menorca (Illes Balears), Red de Semillas de La Rioja (La Rioja), Red Extremeña de Semillas (Extremadura), Red de Semillas de Cantabria (Cantabria), Rede Sementes Galega (Galiza), Red Andaluza de Semillas “Cultivando Biodiversidad” (Andalucía), Red de Semillas de Aragón (Aragón), Nafarroako Hazien Sarea - Red de Semillas de Navarra (Navarra), Red Murciana de Semillas (Región de Murcia), Red de Agroecología y Ecodesarrollo de la Región de Murcia (Región de Murcia) y Euskal Erico Hazien Sarea - Red de Semillas de Euskadi (Euskadi).



Red de Semillas
“Resembrando e Intercambiando”

Nº Registro de Asociaciones:
1/1/586552
C.I.F.: G-91540914

Caracola del C.I.R.
Parque de San Jerónimo s/n
41015 Sevilla (España)

Tfno. / Fax: 954-406-423

correo@redsemillas.info
www.redsemillas.info

The Spanish Context



Traditional varieties contribute organoleptic quality, not just visually, but also by filling our food with flavours and aromas, and they are an inseparable part of our intangible cultural heritage (the Mediterranean diet). They also contribute towards food security and sovereignty by lessening the risk of massive loss of harvests, as their intrinsic diversity favours agro-ecological management of our fields through facilitating the cultivation of many different plant species and varieties, a practice which creates more stability in adverse situations. Traditional varieties symbolize certain ethical values, as they are the expression of food sovereignty and have not yet been totally misappropriated through the rights abuses by intellectual property and patents. They symbolize the cultivated biodiversity that has been developed by male

and female farmers (Red de Semillas, 2011¹).

However, male and female farmers, together with the Redes de Semillas (Seed Networks), are deeply worried about the imminent future of our seeds, and are working to influence the Spanish government to change the agricultural model towards one more supportive of food sovereignty and protection of agricultural biodiversity (Red de Semillas, 2010²).

On the one hand, the Spanish government recognises the rights of male and female farmers as demonstrated in the “Ley de semillas, plantas de vivero y recursos fitogenéticos” (Ley 30/2006, de 26 de julio, de semillas y plantas de vivero y de recursos fitogenéticos. BOE núm. 178, de 27-07-2006³) which is ratified in “Tratado internacional de recursos fitogenéticos para la agricultura y la alimentación” (Instrumento de Ratificación del Tratado Internacional sobre los recursos fitogenéticos para la alimentación y la agricultura, hecho en Roma el 3 de noviembre de 2001. BOE núm. 109, de 05-05-2004⁴) as regards the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate the conservation, use and commercialization of seeds and seedlings preserved on their farms; the protection, conservation and development of traditional knowledge of interest relating to phylogenetic resources for food, agriculture; and the right to participation in the adoption of decisions, at a state level, on matters pertinent to the conservation and sustainable use of these phylogenetic resources.

However, on the other hand, no strategy has been put in place which implements these rights, as is reflected in the “Informe sobre el estado de los recursos fitogenéticos en España” (Centro Nacional de Recursos Fitogenéticos – INIA, 2010⁵). This situation highlights the



- 1 http://www.redandaluzadesemillas.org/IMG/pdf/Manual_VVLL_RAS_2011_10_preguntas.pdf
- 2 <http://www.redsemillas.info/?p=916>
- 3 <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2006/07/27/pdfs/A28165-28178.pdf>
- 4 <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2004/05/05/pdfs/A17239-17253.pdf>
- 5 http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/agphome/documents/PGR/SoW2/country_reports/europe/Spain.pdf

lack of political will that the Spanish government has concerning this topic.

As well as doing little or nothing towards the conservation, promotion, use and exchange of agricultural biodiversity, and unconditionally supporting transgenic crops (Red de Semillas, 2011⁶) in spite of the rejection of public opinion and going against the common interest, the Government continues with its inexplicable policy in favour of genetically modified crops. This behaviour increases the loss of agricultural biodiversity as confirmed in the case of organic maize production in Aragón and Catalunya. (Asamblea Paguesa de Cataluña, Greenpeace y Plataforma Transgénics Fora!, 2006⁷).

In addition, in the last year the the situation has worsened and we have been coming face to face with a new accomplice against agricultural biodiversity, in this case the European Justice system. It has dashed the hopes of the seed networks, farmers and people who have spent years asking for the creation of mechanisms which enforce the rights of male and female farmers to sell their own traditional seed varieties, as well as establishing mechanisms which facilitate the conservation, use and commercialization of seeds saved on their farms, the protection, conservation and development of traditional knowledge, and the right to participate in the adoption of decisions on matters relating to traditional varieties. An increase in genetic erosion in European fields can be expected following the sentence of the Court (Red de Semillas, 2012⁸).



6 <http://www.redsemillas.info/?p=1019>

7 <http://www.greenpeace.org/espana/es/news/ecologistas-y-agricultores-rev/>

8 <http://www.redsemillas.info/?p=1541>

Data on genetic erosion in Spain

In Spain, no study has been carried out on the state of phylogenetic resources for agriculture and food, nor are there any plans to carry out studies on the state of phylogenetic resources for agriculture and food, nor is it even planned to take steps to control and measure genetic erosion (Red de Semillas, 2010⁹).

With regard to data on loss of agricultural biodiversity in Spain, we are in a situation which is the same, or possibly worse than in 1996 (FAO, 1996¹⁰). Some examples of aggravating factors are (Red de Semillas, 2008¹¹):

- a) Maize: due to numerous cases of contamination with transgenic varieties.
- b) Cereal: through the requirement to use certified seeds in order to receive CAP grants, as in the case of durum wheat.
- c) Organic agriculture: obligatory use of certified organic seeds.

After studies and projects carried out by the Red de Semillas it has been found that some local varieties which were still being cultivated in 1996 are no longer preserved, which indicates that the number of varieties which have been lost in these 10+ years could be very high.

Examples include "pipa de trigo" melons (Tentudía, Extremadura), some tomato varieties in the north of Cáceres and a number of peppers (bell peppers, traditional pimentón (paprika), chillies etc.). With regard to cereal species, amongst others, cultivation of vetches, grass peas, rye and avena strigosa (bristle oat) is being abandoned.



9 <http://www.redsemillas.info/?p=926>

10 <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/016/aj633s.pdf>

11 http://www.redsemillas.info/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/informe_rds_estado_rfaa_espana_02may08.pdf

The Campaign “Cultiva diversidad. Siembra tus derechos”



The campaign “Cultivate diversity. Sow your rights” is being promoted by the national coordinating body Red de Semillas “Resembrando e Intercambiando” and the twenty local networks of which it is composed.

The campaign aims to promote organic and rural farming, the use of traditional varieties, the recovery of farming knowledge and local gastronomic culture, to fight against an agriculture of patents and transgenic varieties and organisms, to call for a legal framework which permits male and female farmers to produce and sell their own seeds and to gain strong support from public governing bodies for the task of recovering our cultivated genetic heritage.

Through the campaign “Cultivate diversity. Sow your rights”¹² we urge the Spanish Government to put in place policies necessary for implementing the rights of farmers to conserve, use and commercialize traditional

varieties. It should be possible for these agricultural genetic resources to be a part of their livelihoods.

We aim to bring about a change in legal norms and in government policies that we consider unjust in light of the principles that govern our social life and the constitutional foundation of a democratic state.

Therefore, we promote the sale of seeds by the farmers themselves as a public act, non-violent, conscious and political, against the law, and carried out with the purpose of causing change in government legislation and behavior.

Through acting in this way, we appeal to the sense of justice of the majority of the community, and declare that in our opinion the values of social cooperation between people who make entitlement to food possible, are not being respected through prohibiting male and female farmers from selling seeds, given that traditional varieties are an essential resource for obtaining healthy foods, for respecting the environment through the appropriate use of natural resources and for potentiating rural culture, ethical values and quality of life (Red de Semillas, 2012¹³).

12 <http://www.siembratusderechos.info>

13 <http://www.siembratusderechos.info/?p=540>

Achievements in recent years



With regard to the most successful outcomes achieved by the Red de Semillas in recent years, the following can be considered:

- Creation of the campaign “Derecho de los agricultores al Uso y Conservación de la Biodiversidad” (“Rights of farmers to the use and preservation of biodiversity”) and “Cultiva diversidad. Siembra tus derechos “ (“Cultivate diversity. Sow your rights”).
 - Increase in the number of local seed networks and groups linked to the Red de Semillas.
 - Consolidation of the Agricultural Biodiversity Fair and Conference for Reflections.
- Strengthening of a stable organizational coordination with territorial representation which is managed through working groups.
 - Continuing to publish the informative newsletter Cultivar Local.
 - Developing an Action Plan for Seeds and Agricultural Biodiversity.
 - Becoming recognized as an expert group in the field of cultivated biodiversity in many aspects: investigation, characterization, promotion, knowledge recovery, analyzing regulations which affect agricultural biodiversity, etc.
 - Establishing a higher number of relationships with networks and groups at the state, European and international level.

In a more general context the following has been achieved:

- Greater sensitivity from some regional governments and local entities around these topics.
- Consumer concern about the effects of transgenic plants and animals.



Proposals for initiating a sustainable system for use, exchange and conservation of agricultural biodiversity

Nowadays, farmers face numerous legislative barriers that impact biodiversity management on their farm and which have led to the situation where present loss of biodiversity is a documented and referenced fact in numerous reports and studies at the European and international level. These barriers, in the form of convoluted texts, have caused problems related to:

- Appropriate use of biodiversity and phylogenetic resources.
- Developing an improvement system for local varieties.
- Access to phylogenetic resources.
- Organic seed use by farmers.
- The appropriation of information and intellectual property systems.
- The effect of transgenic varieties and organisms and terminator technology on biodiversity.

A series of problems and premises that the administration, within the framework of its powers, should take into account are grouped together below (Red de Semillas, 2008¹⁴):

I. Problems which affect the correct usage of biodiversity and phylogenetic resources in organic agriculture

- EU regulations on organic farming do not reflect the standardized use of local varieties.
- There is no monitoring of the evolution of agricultural biodiversity in use through plant propagating material for organic agriculture.
- Absence of local varieties in the commercial varieties register.
- Bringing out varieties of interest to organic farming which lie forgotten in arboretums and living collections.
- Sharing information about local varieties and promoting their exchange.
- Increasing the level of knowledge that farmers and consumers have concerning the importance of diversity for the sustainable production of food.
- Achieving more involvement from the local social fabric in the preservation and use of agricultural biodiversity.

II. Problems which inhibit the development of an improvement system for varieties suitable for organic agriculture

- Recover knowledge about farmers' methods for selection and improvement.
- Start participative systems for selection and improvement of varieties for organic agriculture.
- Farmers developing improvement trials on the farm.
- Lack of integration between the needs of organic farmers and public research centers.
- Better understanding of the specific needs for improvement for organic farming.
- Varieties obtained through techniques of dubious compatibility with organic agriculture regulations.
- Transgenic contamination of organic production.

III. Problems which affect access to phylogenetic resources

17. Facilitating access to commercial varieties which are completing their period of protection.

14 <http://www.redsemillas.info/?p=362>

18. Facilitating exchange of varieties between farmers within the legal framework.
19. Facilitating access for farmers to funds for collections.

IV. Problems which inhibit the use of organic plant material by farmers

- Increasing the autonomy of farmers with regard to the choice of plant material.
- Control and certification of plant propagating material by the farmer on his own farm.
- Control and certification of seedlings and rootstocks exchanged by farmers.
- Appropriate adaptation of regulations to facilitate production of seedlings in small companies.
- Facilitating farmers' access to information about the supply of organic plants.
- Extending the debate on organic plant propagation material to the entire sector.
- Improving knowledge about the demand for organic plants.
- Improving training for farmers in topics related to the vegetative propagation of fruit trees, grafting and obtaining seedlings.
- Promoting the creation of small and medium-sized entities for plant production.
- Facilitating access to organic plants for gardeners.

V. Problems related to the appropriation of information and intellectual property systems which interfere with the development of organic agriculture

- Preventing the appropriation of the public heritage of phylogenetic resources by private individuals.
- Preventing the private appropriation of local plant material.
- Establishing fee payments for commercializing plants improved by using local plant material.
- Preventing biopiracy and illicit traffic of genetic resources at a global level.
- Reestablishing the right of the farmer to propagate all species on her/his farm.
- Preventing the use of patents on living things in sustainable agriculture.
- Assuring social representation in decision making forums on ownership of genetic resources and living beings.

